

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

April 2, 2021 – GOOD FRIDAY (YR. B)

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Homily: *“Healing and Hope through the Passion of Christ”*

Isaiah 52:13—53:12 (Isaiah’s prophecy of the Suffering Servant)
Psalm 22 (A prayer of lament foreshadowing Christ’s crucifixion)
Hebrews 4:14–16; 5:7–9 (God testifies that He will make a new Covenant with us through the Blood of Christ)
St. John 18:1—19:42 (The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to St. John)

How can we hear St. John's account of Jesus' Passion and not be moved by it? Recently, I read that someone asked a teenager about the 2004 now-classic film, "The Passion of Christ." The question was: "What would you think of someone who didn't cry while watching the movie?" The young person responded, "He would be evil." That youth was so moved by watching the movie that he could not understand why anyone could fail to be moved by watching the film. The Passion of Jesus does move us. It moves us because Jesus suffered in a very real, graphic, and painful way.

In our first lesson from Isaiah, we heard a prophecy of Jesus' Passion, "Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; He was oppressed, and he was afflicted ... yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter ..." ...

Our Psalm for this evening (Psalm 22) also foretells the suffering of Our Lord upon the Cross: "scorned by men, and despised by the people. All who see me mock at me ... they wag their heads; 'He committed his cause to the Lord; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, for he delights in him!' they have pierced my hands and feet—I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots."

The Passion of Jesus moves us because we know in our hearts that we are the ones who inflicted this suffering on Our Lord. It was not just the arrogant chief priests and the cruel Roman soldiers who brought this suffering on Jesus—they were only the instruments of God's will. It was our sins that inflicted the dreadful agony on Jesus.

Perhaps sadder still, whenever we sin, we crucify Jesus once more. We nail Him to the Cross again, because Christ is outside of time, having no past, present, or future. As Hebrews 13:8 tells us, He is "the same yesterday, today and forever." So then, St. John's account of the Passion of Jesus should move us to flee from sin, to leave sin behind.

This is why we need the Sacrament of Reconciliation—that is, Confession and Absolution—because the Passion of Jesus shows us who we truly are: sinners who have crucified Our Lord. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we turn to Jesus again and ask for His mercy.

And, through the Passion of Jesus, we receive His forgiveness. As Isaiah (53:5) reminds us, "by His wounds we are healed." Although it seems to make no sense to us, particularly with our postmodern sensibilities, it is nevertheless true that through the bloody stripes made by the whip on Jesus' back, through the hemorrhaging holes in His hands and feet, we receive healing for our souls and bodies, and even our very existence in eternity.

When things in our lives hurt us, and we are pained by what we see happening in the world around us, when we need healing and reassurance, even when it is not Holy Week, we can turn to meditating on the Passion of Jesus and find the answer there, “by His wounds we are healed.”

In fact, in Saint Luke’s account of Jesus’ Passion, there are two instances of healing recorded: First, Jesus healed the ear of the high priest’s servant which Peter cut off with a sword, during Jesus’ arrest in Gethsemane (Luke 22:50-51). The second was when the longstanding enmity was healed between King Herod, a Jew, and Pilate, a Roman Procurator, as together they agreed that Jesus should be put to death. Luke 23:12 (NIV) tells us: “That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies.”

The crowd that welcomed Jesus with palm branches turned against Him just as quickly as they had hailed Him as their king, abandoning Him to a lonely death. Peter, too, turned from Jesus to save his own image. Do we hear our conscience crowing like that rooster, when we sin?

May God give us grace to open our spiritual eyes and frankly see how we have offended Christ, and in fact, the ways in which we hurt Him daily. And then, may God grant us the courage to flee from sin and be restored, remembering that “by His wounds, we are healed.”¹

I would like to close with an adaptation of an historic prayer which I believe fits well our intentions of this night, indeed, of our lives henceforth:

“Passion of Christ, strengthen us! Strengthen us under the pressure of temptation.
 Strengthen us when principle is at stake. Strengthen us to do Your Will, Lord God.
 Strengthen us in moments of suffering, in times of loneliness, in periods of depression.
 Strengthen us that we may never swerve from You, dear Christ, nor weaken
 ... through a desire to be popular, or through hope of social distinction.
 Strengthen us to accept our cross and carry it generously to the end.
 On the battlefield of life, stand by us that we may never prove traitors in the ranks.
 Stand by us that we may not be dazzled by the glitter and glow of the enemy camp.
Amen.”²

Even after Good Friday is past, I invite you to continue to meditate on the Passion of Jesus. Allow it to become a source of inner healing for your soul. Do not waste the rest of this week. As you walk the way of the Cross with Jesus, continue meditating on His Passion. And, as you do, Christ will lead you into the peace, hope, and joy of Easter morning. *Amen.*

¹ Adapt. Tommy Lane, “The Passion of Jesus Shows Us Up as Sinners and Heals Us,” 2007 <http://www.frtommylane.com/homilies/year_c/palm_sunday.htm> 1 April 2015. Used with permission.

² Adapt. “Passion of Christ, Strengthen Me, Prayer,” © 2015, [Catholic Online](http://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=1687) <<http://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=1687>> 1 April 2015.